

NEWS RELEASE

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The Woodlands Township awarded grant to purchase new buses

THE WOODLANDS, TEXAS (July 15, 2014) – The Woodlands Township announced today it has been awarded a grant to purchase 25 new buses for The Woodlands Express, the commuter transit system which provides weekday service from The Woodlands to destinations in Houston. The competitive grant, which is administered by the Houston-Galveston Area Council and funded by the Federal Transit Administration, is intended to help transit providers improve and expand transit service, reduce congestion, and improve regional air quality.

The Woodlands Express is widely regarded as one of the most successful commuter bus services in the country, accounting for over 26 million passenger miles annually. According to officials, The Woodlands Township will use the funding to purchase and own the majority of the vehicles in its fleet. Historically, the buses utilized to operate The Woodlands Express have been leased through a third-party operator. Owning the vehicles, officials say, will provide operational savings allowing them to improve and expand their service.

A study being conducted by H-GAC and the Township is currently underway and will provide options to The Township for improving future transit service operations. Alternatives being considered include reverse-commute service from Houston to The Woodlands area and new commuter service to the Uptown-Galleria area. With congestion growing in the Houston area, and large companies like ExxonMobil relocating their businesses north, demand for alternative modes of commuting has never been higher.

"This opportunity couldn't have come at a better time," said Chris LaRue, Transit Program Manager for The Woodlands Township. "We have one of the most successful systems in the country. Being able to build on that success and provide a safe and streamlined commute to new destinations is a win-win."

The competitive grant, known as the H-GAC Transit Fleet Expansion Program, will provide over \$14 million in funding over three years. The Township has committed approximately \$3 million to the total as a local funding match and will continue to fund the operations and maintenance of the fleet through grant funds and user fees. The cost of the Township grant match is expected to be repaid over a 4 year period using costs savings achieved through Township bus ownership.

The Woodlands Express was previously operated by the Brazos Transit District. As a result of

THE WOODLANDS TOWNSHIP

The Woodlands, TX



the 2010 Census, the Township became a direct recipient of FTA grant funding and assumed responsibility for park and ride operations. The Township continues to contract with Brazos to provide day to day management and oversight of the park and ride operations.

Initial orders for the new coaches are expected to be made in late 2014. The Township anticipates the first vehicles to be delivered in 10 to 12 months.

For more information on The Woodlands Township, please visit <u>www.thewoodlandstownship-tx.gov</u>, or call 281-210-3800.

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